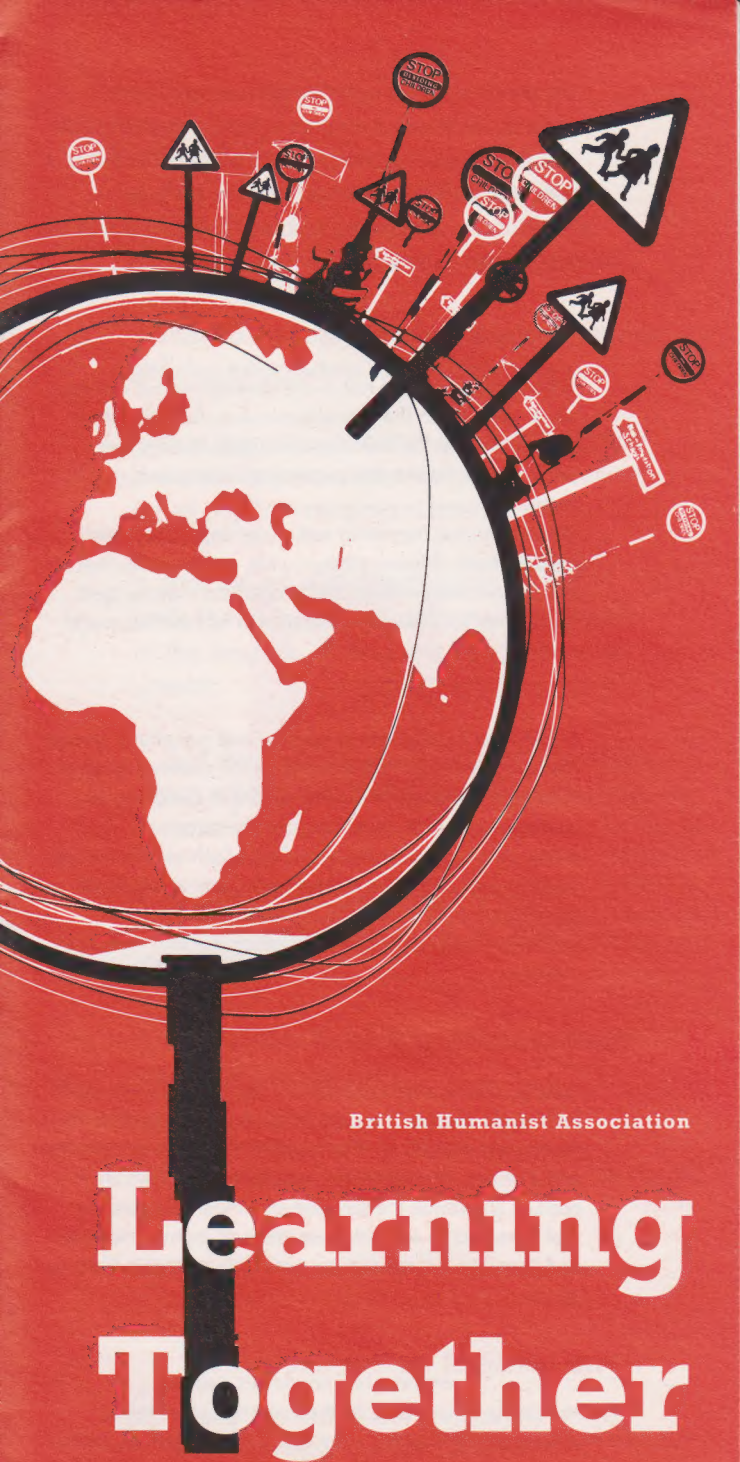

British Humanist Association

Learning Together

The case for integrated schools

THE BRITISH HUMANIST ASSOCIATION IS OPPOSED TO THE EXISTENCE OF RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS IN THE UK. WE BELIEVE THAT RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS SERIOUSLY IMPEDE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MORE INTEGRATED AND TOLERANT SOCIETY; AND THAT THE STATE FUNDING OF RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS CREATES AN UNFAIR AND UNWORKABLE SYSTEM.

LEARNING TOGETHER

Schools play a central role in the development of individuals. In addition to the formal curriculum, both the ethos of a school and the make-up of its student body can profoundly influence the values and understanding of its pupils.

We believe that friendship and mutal respect between children from different backgrounds, and an ethos that encourages responsibility and cooperation, lay the best foundation for a peaceful, happy and harmonious world.

A CHANGED SOCIETY

In 1944 the dual system of 'county' and 'voluntary' schools was set up in England and Wales by the coalition government as a compromise. Society then was comparatively homogeneous with fewer religious divisions.

WE CAN FUNCTION WELL ONLY IF WE RESPECT EACH OTHER AND TOLERATE EACH OTHER'S BELIEFS

Today we are a multicultural and multifaith society. We can function well only if we respect each other and tolerate each other's beliefs. And, to achieve this, we need to understand and appreciate how others live and the values they hold.

SHARED VALUES

County schools are microcosms of the multicultural, multifaith world outside. They are uniquely able to provide the neutral atmosphere in which shared values can be explored and a respect for differences established. Teachers are in a position to provide the sensitive and impartial approach that is needed to achieve these ideals of mutual tolerance and harmony. It is society's responsibility to enable them to do so.

RESPECT FOR DIFFERENCES

THE DANGER OF SECTARIANISM

Humanists believe that, by their very nature, religious schools create divisions in society. A segregated educational system can reinforce distrust and hatred between people of

REINFORCE HATRED

different beliefs. Humanists believe the bitter conflict in Northern Ireland illustrates this all too clearly.

FRIENDSHIP ACROSS FAITH COMMUNITIES

Children who attend religious schools have much less opportunity to meet children from other faiths and cultures and to form friendships across the faith communities. They are thus deprived of a crucially important part of their education. The long-term damage from this omission cannot be overstated.

WIDENING DIVISIONS

ETHNIC MINORITIES DON'T WANT SEGREGATION

State support is already provided for Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish schools. This separation has set a precedent and Muslims are now claiming an equal right to have their own schools too. However, Humanists feel that to segregate children from Muslim or other non-Christian homes could very easily breed inter-religious and inter-racial strife. While accepting that sensitivity to cultural issues like diet and clothing are important, we do not consider segregation to be the answer.

EXTREMIST DEMANDS

Recent research [1] in Birmingham shows clearly that the huge majority of both parents and children from the ethnic minorities do not want segregation by religion. Their response in this survey shows that they recognise the dangers. Among them and among Christians it is extremists who are making these demands.

[1] Citizens of this Country, Multilingual Matters 1990

WHICH RELIGIONS?

WHERE TO DRAW THE LINE

Recent calls for state funded Muslim schools have led many to question the discrimination implicit in the refusal to extend state funding to schools of Muslim and other ethnic minority religions. But any argument for extending state support requires consideration of where (and why) to draw the line. Many people, who feel that it is unfair not to give state funding to Muslim schools, would be unhappy if support were also to be given to, say, Mormons, Moonies, Scientologists, and extreme religious cults. Yet to exclude any of these would equally be 'unfair'. Humanists believe that the only fair and workable solution is not to fund any new religious schools and to start phasing out the state funding of existing ones.

'UNFAIR' TO MOONIES

THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

Many religious leaders make it clear that they want their own schools in order to instil in children their own religious

beliefs:

The purpose of Church schools 'is furthering the Catholic mission... witnessing to the faith and presenting Catholic liturgy and practice as the norm,'

Report of Diocese of Arundel and Brighton, August 1991

'We want our children to be good Muslims, whereas this society wants children to be independent in their thinking'

Liaqat Hussein of the Council of Mosques. [2]

[2] Sunday Times, December 15 1985

Humanists believe that education ought to foster children's desire and ability to increase their knowledge and find firm foundations for their beliefs and values through open enquiry and reasoning. Instruction that aims to create unquestioning acceptance of religious beliefs is a betrayal of these broadly shared educational values.

BETRAYAL OF EDUCATIONAL VALUES

There must be grave concern too that girls in Muslim schools might not receive equality of educational opportunity, and would be taught to take a subordinate role. Any inequality in girls' educational opportunity would undermine their basic human rights.

GIRLS TAUGHT A SUBORDINATE ROLE

AN UNWORKABLE SYSTEM

In 1991, nearly 500 Bangladeshi children in Tower Hamlets were deprived of schooling because the local Catholic school (which had many spare places) refused to admit them and there were no places elsewhere. In 1992 in Birmingham and Darlington the Church of England was demanding money for more classrooms while places were available in nearby county schools. To support religious schools the state pays 100% of their running costs and 85% of capital costs. This dual system of county and religious schools distorts the fair distribution of educational resources and undermines the effective running of the state system.

UNDERMINING THE STATE SYSTEM

Humanists believe that everyone is entitled to a county school place. At present, in many rural areas in particular, the only school is the church school and there is no choice.

THE FUTURE

Humanists have a vision of a fairer, better society and a more open and objective education for all children. We look forward to a time when the children in all our schools can learn and play in harmony and fellowship, growing up together to become citizens of a world community.

HARMONY AND FELLOWSHIP

THE BHA PROPOSES

- that no further state funded religious schools should be accepted, whether the demand is from Christians or non-Christians;

- that no school should be allowed to provide reduced educational opportunities for girls;

- that there should be scrupulous inspection and enforcement of the National Curriculum for all pupils in religious schools;

- that the education authorities should press for an open, non-doctrinaire approach to the teaching of Religious Education in all schools;

- that every school should establish an ethos which reflects the shared moral values of the community;

- that only collective assembly which celebrates shared human values should be allowed in schools;

- that all state funding for religious schools should be phased out.

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THE BRITISH HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

HUMANISM IS A WAY OF THINKING AND LIVING THAT AIMS TO BRING OUT THE BEST IN PEOPLE, SO THAT ALL PEOPLE CAN HAVE THE BEST IN LIFE.

A HUMANIST BELIEVES THAT THE HAPPINESS OF INDIVIDUALS AND OF HUMANKIND DEPENDS ON PEOPLE RATHER THAN ON RELIGION AND DOGMA. MORALITY IS BASED ON THE RECOGNITION OF WHAT MAKES LIFE WORTHWHILE. THESE VALUES GIVE US RIGHTS, FREEDOM AND DIGNITY, BUT THEY ALSO GIVE US RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR OWN LIVES, AND FOR HELPING OTHERS AND WORKING TO ACHIEVE A BETTER WORLD.

THE BRITISH HUMANIST ASSOCIATION ADVISES AND CAMPAIGNS ON MORAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES FROM A HUMANIST VIEWPOINT, AND WORKS TO PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF THE NON-RELIGIOUS. A NATIONWIDE MEMBERSHIP ORGANISATION, THE BHA SUPPORTS LOCAL HUMANIST GROUPS AROUND THE COUNTRY, AND PROVIDES COMMUNITY SERVICES, INCLUDING HUMANIST CEREMONIES FOR BABY NAMINGS, WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS.

THE BHA PROVIDES TEACHING MATERIALS ABOUT HUMANISM AND A WIDE RANGE OF MORAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES. BHA BRIEFINGS ON EDUCATIONAL ISSUES INCLUDE **SHARED VALUES** – HUMANIST VIEWS ON RELIGIOUS AND MORAL EDUCATION, **STANDING TOGETHER** – ADVICE ON SHARED VALUES ASSEMBLIES, AND **THE HUMAN SPIRIT** – HUMANIST VIEWS ON SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATION, AND ARE AVAILABLE FREE FROM THE BHA. THE BHA ALSO RUNS AN EDUCATION NETWORK THAT PROVIDES SUPPORT AND INFORMATION FOR MEMBERS INVOLVED IN EDUCATION.

THE BHA RELIES ON THE SUPPORT OF ITS MEMBERS TO FURTHER ITS AIMS. IF YOU SHARE THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THIS LEAFLET PLEASE CONSIDER JOINING THE BHA – EVERY ADDITION TO OUR NUMBERS ADDS FORCE TO THE HUMANIST CAUSE.

The BHA is a member of the International Humanist and Ethical Union which has consultative status in the United Nations, UNESCO and the Council of Europe.